THOREAU AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Long celebrated as a founding figure in the environmental movement, nineteenth-century naturalist Henry David Thoreau has come to play a major role in the effort to deal with climate change in the twenty-first century.

The voluminous records he kept of weather conditions and the bloom times of various plants are now being used by climate scientists to track the effects of warming in New England. More broadly, his writings on resistance to injustice have inspired climate activists around the world to practice civil disobedience to protest the general failure of governments to take action to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

ANNOTATED LECTURE, DISCUSSION & PAPER TOPICS

- In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau jokingly described himself as "a self-appointed inspector of snow storms and rain storms," feigning surprise that town officials did not see fit to pay him for his faithful performance of his duties. But if he did not manage to earn a living by carefully recording weather-related events in nineteenth-century Concord, he did leave extensive notes on flowering times and bird migrations that have proved invaluable to scientists who are tracking the course of climate change at Walden Pond and its environs.

- The work of Richard Primack and others on the effects of climate change in Concord, Massachusetts illustrates how seemingly insignificant increases in regional

focusing on the local environment.
- In recent years, environmentalists have drawn inspiration from Henry David Thoreau by focusing not on his works on nature, but on his political writings, especially "Resistance to Civil Government," which outlined his views on civil disobedience, and "Slavery in Massachusetts," which argued that the apparent triumph of pro-slavery forces during the 1850's had, in effect, reduced the natural world to ashes.

SOURCES

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Background information on Thoreau

The Thoreau Society/Thoreau's Life & Legacy

Mapping Thoreau Country: Tracking Henry David Thoreau's Travels in Massachusetts

Thoreau's contributions to climate science

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Thoreau's influence in the climate justice movement today

Wen Stephenson, "Civil Disobedience and Our Radical Moment," Thoreau Society Blog, May 2013.

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Michael Brune, "From Walden to the White House: Why Climate Change Demands Civil Disobedience," *Common Dreams*, January 23, 2013.

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